

FIRST FOCUS: CHILDREN'S HEALTH

STATE CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM (SCHIP)

First Focus is a bipartisan advocacy organization that is committed to making children and their families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. Children's health, education, family economics, child welfare, and child safety are the five core issue areas around which First Focus is working to promote bipartisan policy solutions.



With nine million uninsured children in America today children's health insurance is an urgent national issue. A poll commissioned by First Focus in the summer of 2007 and performed by GOP strategist and pollster Frank Luntz, found that 90 percent of Americans believe that every child in America has a right to basic healthcare. Children's health coverage is a fundamental issue – children cannot read if they have poor vision, understand their teachers if they cannot hear, or learn if they are sick. No child in America should go without medical care because they lack access to coverage.

Since 1997, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) has helped to reduce the number of uninsured children by one-third. Along with Medicaid, the program currently covers more than six million low-income children. No government program has been more successful in expanding children's health coverage. If SCHIP can produce those results in just ten years, imagine what it can accomplish in another ten.

Last fall, strong bipartisan majorities in both the House and the Senate passed two versions of legislation that would have reauthorized the Children's Health Insurance Program (the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA I and II respectively, H.R. 976 and H.R. 3963). These proposals would have strengthened the important federal investment in children's health. Unfortunately, the President vetoed these bills, leaving Congress to enact an extension of the current program (S. 2499) through March 2009.

The bills that were approved by Congress would have built on SCHIP's decade of success by covering the 6.6 million children currently enrolled in SCHIP and Medicaid and an additional 3.1 million children who are currently uninsured, ensuring coverage for nearly 10 million low-income children. The bill would have been fully funded using a 61-cent increase in the federal tobacco tax.

First Focus was disappointed that the strong bipartisan support that SCHIP reauthorization won in the House and the Senate from members on both sides of the aisle was rejected by the White House and did not result in a comprehensive five-year reauthorization in 2007. As we wait for Congress to reengage on SCHIP reauthorization in 2009, First Focus will continue to urge Congress to take whatever action is possible to improve access and coverage for low-income children, with a particular focus on the 6 million children who are eligible but unenrolled in SCHIP or Medicaid. In all of our advocacy on children's health

coverage, First Focus' will continue to urge Congress to include our leading priorities in any SCHIP reauthorization bill. Specifically, any five-year SCHIP reauthorization proposal should include provisions to:

- ◆ **Fully fund SCHIP.** At a bare minimum, reauthorization should ensure that no currently-covered children lose coverage as a result of reauthorization.
- ◆ **Enroll more children.** Despite SCHIP's enormous success, two-thirds of children eligible to receive coverage under SCHIP remain unenrolled in the program. Reauthorization should streamline provide states with the resources and tools to enroll more children in the program and improve enrollment processes by allowing states to establish an "Express Lane" option. Express Lane improves enrollment of uninsured kids by targeting children who are already enrolled in public programs which have similar eligibility requirements, like Food Stamps, school lunch and WIC. Approximately 70 percent of all of the children who are eligible but unenrolled in SCHIP or Medicaid participate in another federal means-tested program. This common-sense change alone would make coverage more accessible for millions of our children.
- ◆ **Broaden access to care.** Reauthorization should improve coverage for dental and mental health services, and give states the option to cover pregnant women and other populations including legal immigrant children. In addition, reauthorization should address the onerous citizenship documentation requirements that are making it more difficult for qualified U.S. children to get the access to the health care services they need and deserve.

Children represent one-fourth of our population but all of our future. First Focus will continue to urge Congress and the President to stand with our children and to enact a strong SCHIP reauthorization.



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MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY